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ABSTRACT

Emigres associated with Black Star Picture Agency and "Life" shared much in common: most were well-educated European Jews who became journalists after being involved in other professions and most had worked for German magazines and had emigrated to the United States to pursue their careers while escaping the Nazis. After being trained on the editorial staffs of two German magazines, Fritz Goro was forced by the Nazis to abandon his career. He and his family emigrated to France in 1933 and he turned to a second career, photography, in order to survive. He discovered that he could apply what he had learned in Germany about candid photography to his own photoreportages. Goro wanted to emigrate to America but had trouble obtaining a visa. He finally arrived in the United States with is family in 1936. Goro than joined Black Star and, like other photographers who had fled Hitler, he produced photo essays for "Life." After five years with the agency, Goro went directly under contract to "Life." He became a staff photographer in 1944 and was a scientific/medical specialist for twenty-seven years. During conversation on two separate occasions with Goro, it became clear that his background, discipline, and talent enabled him and others like him to move into the mainstream of the developing American picture magazine business. (Author/DF)

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ABSTRACT

VISUAL COMMUNICATION DIVISION

FRITZ GORO ON TAPE: AN ÉMIGRÉ PHOTOJOURNALIST'S PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHY

by

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Émigrés associated with Black Star Picture Agency and LIFE shared a great deal in common: most were well-educated and well-traveled European Jews who became photojournalists after being involved in other professions; most had worked for German picture magazines while and emigrated to New York during the Depression to pursue their careers while escaping the Nazis.

Trained on the editorial staffs of the BERLINER ILLUSTRIRTE ZEITUNG and MUNCHNER ILLUSTRIERTE PRESSE, Fritz Goro was forced by the Nazis to abandon his career in management. He and his family emigrated to France in 1933 and to survive, Goro then turned to a second career--photography. He discovered he could apply what he had learned in Germany about candid photography to his own photoreportages. Like many others, Goro wanted to emigrate to America, but had trouble obtaining a visa. He finally arrived in the United States with his family in January 1936. Soon after his arrival, Goro joined Black Star; like so many photographers who fled Hitler Germany, he produced photo essays for the fledgling LIFE. After nearly five years with the agency, Goro went directly under contract to LIFE. In 1944 he became a LIFE staff photographer and remained as the preeminent scientific/medical specialist for twenty-seven years.

During hours of conversation on two separate occasions with Goro, it became clear his broad educational background, his discipline, and his innate talent enabled him, and émigrés like him, to move successfully into the mainstream of the developing American picture magazine business.

Presented to the Visual Communication Division at the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in Memphis, Tennessee, August 4, 1985.

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The Great Depression was a time rich with developments in the world of photojournalism, not the least of which was the wave of European photographers who came to the United States to escape Hitler and the Nazis. Although all émigré photojournalists did not follow precisely the same path to this country during the 1930s, there are striking similarities among most of their stories.

The émigrés who came to be associated with Black Star Picture Agency in New York City and/or America's first picture magazine, LIFE, shared a great deal in common: most of them were Jews; most were well educated and well traveled; most came to photojournalism after studying other subjects and after being involved in other professions; most had worked for a variety of publications while moving around Europe; and most emigrated to the United States during the mid-1930s to pursue their careers and make a new life for themselves and their families.

The model émigré for a case study would be a photographer in his native land who made the successful transition into the American picture magazine business. Fritz Goro was such a man. As a case study, he is particularly suitable because he is reflective and analytical about his career changes and the political situation he shared with others during the 1930s. Like the photographers he represents, Goro is a well-educated Jew who came to photography after studying art and working in other aspects of journalism.

Trained on the editorial staffs of the BERLINER ILLUSTRIRTE ZEITUNG and MÜNCHNER ILLUSTRIERTE PRESSE, Goro was forced by the political situation in Germany to abandon his career in management. He and his family emigrated to France in 1933 and to survive, Goro then turned to a second career—photography. He discovered he could apply what he had learned in Germany about candid photography to his own photoreportages. Like many fellow Europeans, Goro wanted to emigrate to America, but had trouble obtaining a U.S. visa. He finally arrived in the United States with his wife and son in January 1936. Soon after his arrival, Goro joined

Black Star, and, like so many photographers who fled Hitler Germany, he produced photo essays for the fledgling LIFE. After nearly five years with Black Star, Goro went directly under contract to LIFE. In 1944 he became a LIFE staff photographer, and he remained one for twenty-seven years.

Goro's professional biography provides insight into the situation many German-trained photographers faced during the mid- to late-1930s. Like the other émigrés, Goro was determined to survive and continue his career, whether it be in his native land or the United States. After leaving all his worldly possessions behind in Germany, he was interested in earning substantial wages in the United States so he could rebuild his library and record collection while living in a comfortable home in a New York City suburb.

During hours of conversation with Goro on two separate occasions,[1] it became clear that few would consider him modest, but not a braggart either. Goro gladly tells of his accomplishments, the photographic "firsts" he achieved during half a century in the profession. Like the scientists he photographed, Goro has a talent for detail and an ability to analyze his surroundings. He considers himself a pioneer in the field of scientific photography, taking special pride in his awards and honors from scientific groups and photographic associations.

He has good reason to be impressed with his own work; he is one of an elite group known for excellent scientific and medical photographs. Goro's broad educational background, his discipline, and his innate talent enabled him, and émigrés like him, to move successfully into the mainstream of the developing American picture magazine business.

GORO IN EUROPE

Goro's early home life in Bremen, Germany, at the turn of the century was rich culturally. "I am a typical product of a German Jewish, highly-educated middle class," he says. "Our main interests were culture: the arts, books, music. My father was a doctor, a general practitioner, and I believe we never had much money,

but I never really knew—until today I don't know how well or bad we were off. It was a problem that was never discussed with us children, which is typically German. We wouldn't know about material things, so we also had a lot of impractical education."

As a young boy Goro was given a "Brownie" camera. When he was eleven, he won a prize from the German branch of Kodak for a photograph of his father. Although he was interested in photography, he never considered a career as a photographer; instead he wanted to become a graphic artist. Goro studied graphic design and sculpture at the State School of Applied Arts in Berlin, where in 1919 he met Carola ("Greta") Gregor, a sculptor, whom he married five years later. He also studied under Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus in Weimar, and the school's philosophy continues to influence his work. But he is quick to point out he was too young to appreciate much of what he was exposed to there: "I wish I had been older, more mature when I was a student at the Bauhaus."

The death of Goro's father in 1919 and the subsequent years of high inflation forced him to abandon his studies. He knew the art director in the magazine division at the House of Ullstein (a large publishing conglomerate similar to Henry Luce's Time Inc.), so he showed him a sample of his illustrations and advertising copy he had written. Goro's modern portfolio impressed the art director, so he hired him in 1924 as a designer/art director/text writer in the corporate publicity office of Ullstein's magazine division. Because of the corporation's size and diversity, Goro calls Ullstein the "Sears-Roebuck of publishing—their publications appealed to all tastes."

Most of Ullstein's 12,000 employees were expected to do more than one job. "In German publishing, you had to do everything. Here [in America] you are a writer and do nothing else, but there [in Germany] you make your own drawings, you write your own publicity texts, you do your own layouts. I was inside a small group of very talented young men of my age who could make drawings, who could write, who could do

absolutely anything. We could express ourselves. It was great fun. It was a very interesting atmosphere. It was an incredible kind of training in many fields of publishing."

Ullstein employees also were encouraged to freelance within the company for extremely generous additional compensation. Goro and his wife wrote and illustrated articles for various Ullstein publications, including a children's magazine.

After two years in corporate publicity, Goro was "sick" of his job and wanted to earn more money by becoming an editor. He wrote to Kurt Korff, director of Ullstein publication, suggesting ten ideas for BIZ articles. Since Goro considered Korff a very shy, absolutely unapproachable "genius" as a journalist, he put his ideas in writing rather than speaking directly with Korff. Impressed by some of Goro's suggestions, Korff offered Goro a huge commission. In 1926, Korff and Kurt Safranski, who was the magazine division's publisher at the time, asked Goro to join the editorial staff.

As the youngest staff member at the BIZ and DIE DAME, Goro acted as the "contact man" for young German artists and writers. (He had done this earlier in the corporate publicity office.) In addition to locating and organizing new photographic talent, Goro served as the "idea man" for the younger generation of photographers. From 1926 to 1928, Goro used his camera mostly to "show other photographers how to take pictures, without mixing with them. It wasn't done. It was against the code. As an editor, it was against the code to compete with the photographers." Nevertheless, Goro did become close friends with several photographers, including Dr. Erich Salomon, whom he had first met when they worked together in the Ullstein corporate publicity office.

Although Goro was making more money on the editorial staff, in 1928 he decided to leave the company. "After a few years at Ullstein, I figured out that at your first job you're always underpaid," he says. However, he readily acknowledges the

importance of his four years there: "Just like LIFE later on, it was a fantastic training ground for German publishing. It was actually the training ground for German publishing because in universities you could not learn journalism; there were no faculties for journalism, and you had to learn like an apprentice—on the job."

Looking for a position on the MIP, Goro contacted the president of the Knorr and Hirth Publishing Co., the largest publishing house in southern Germany. This Munich-based company, like Ullstein, was well known for its newspapers and books and was becoming very successful in magazine publishing. Goro was hired at an "extremely high salary" to be assistant to the company president, Dr. Pflaum. Goro joined the MIP's staff at an exciting time, just as the circulation battle with the BIZ began and Stefan Lorant was hired as the new managing editor.

The late 1920s were very good years for the magazine business because Germany was experiencing a period of relative prosperity. There was great interest in the arts, and mass circulation picture magazines flourished. Goro found himself very well paid for work he really enjoyed. "I was a product of a journalistic boom. It was an incredible and inspiring time," Goro says.

As the talent scout and contact man for artists and the arts at the MIP, Goro "discovered" several photographers who went on to become quite successful, including brothers Georg and Tim Gidal and Fritz Henle, who later joined the staff of LIFE. This new generation of magazine photographers raised the level of professionalism, according to Goro. Photojournalists at that time were not considered by most editors and publishers to be an important part of the creative process. "They [mostly newspaper photographers] were used as tools in the hands of editors, but they had no standing. Nobody really cared. They were told what to do, even though at this time in Germany there were a large number of very excellent portrait photographers, landscape photographers, and industrial photographers." But photographers like Salomon and Martin Munkacsi at the BIZ and DIE DAME, and the group Goro worked with at the MIP, brought a fresh approach to photoreportage.

This new approach was best summarized by Tim Gidal: "The common denominator shared by the great photoreporters was the combination of (1) talent for observation and the ability to experience and participate intensely, and (2) sensitivity, empathy, and intuition for capturing the essential quality of the whole in the single picture."[2] Much of what these European photographers sought out with the camera was the very thing Gidal found himself shooting: "how does man live, how does he fit into his society, and what is the life in this society?"[3]

The new 35mm cameras contributed greatly to the development of this new approach and in Goro's view they were the key. "Picture reportage, the picture story, really is a product of German picture journalism of the time between World War I and Hitler, and it's based on a very strange fact. It's based actually on a single fact—that around 1928 there suddenly became an instrument available [the 35mm camera, the Leica] which literally seduced them to take photographs for the journalistic world. These were journalistic writers, and they were sent by newspapers and magazines all over the world and they suddenly had in their pockets a small instrument which could allow them to take pictures of things they were reporting about."

Goro even gives the Leica credit for bringing a new type a photographer to the publishing scene: an educated person who might even have a university background. "The difference was similar to the difference between somebody who had gone to Harvard or someone who had started as an apprentice at the [New York] DAILY NEWS. There was some kind of social difference. That may sound snobbish, but that's the way it was. Suddenly, very intelligent people began to take pictures because there was this strange instrument available—the Leica."

Although it is difficult to give all the credit for the growth of photoreportage to the 35mm camera, this new format was especially appealing because of its portability and versatility. Brawn was no longer a requirement to be a photographer. The miniature camera allowed writers and other educated men and women to photograph inconspicuously, enabling them to catch people in unguarded moments. The new

challeng s 35mm photography presented attracted a different class of photographers, which in turn helped to raise the overall status of photography. Gisèle Freund noted this change in PHOTOGRAPHY & SOCIETY. When professionals were limited to using very large, bulky cameras, according to Freund,

> photographers were selected for physical strength rather than talent....The subject was of little importance to these first photoreporters, whose editors measured the success of a photograph in terms of its clarity and suitability for reproduction....None of their photographs were signed, and for almost half a century the press photographer was considered inferior, a kind of servant who took orders, but who had no initiative.[4]

In her opinion, it was not until a new generation of photographers came on the scene in Germany that the profession gained prestige. Freund described this group (of which she was a member) as well-mannered, fluent in foreign languages, university educated, and members of the bourgeois or aristocratic society who had retained social status even after losing their money and political power after the war.[5]

During his tenure at the MIP, Goro worked closely with this new generation of photographers, learning the photo essay techniques he would later use in his own work. He created several photoreportages which were published in the MIP while he was employed there.[6] Although Goro he was not officially employed as a photographer, he had the freedom in the early 1930s to shoot feature-oriented assignments, including an essay on Germany's largest Benedictine monastery. Several photographs from this reportage show monks caught in motion—pitching hay, repairing a shoe, and hammering hot iron. Goro also incorporated strong diagonal lines in many frames to create the illusion of depth and to give the image internal motion. The experience he gained on assignments like this helped him to produce the photoreportages he needed a few years later to support himself and his family in France.

Goro began working with Stefan Lorant in 1931, soon after Pflaum's death. Pflaum's successor, with whom Goro did not get along, was unimaginative, according to Goro, so he decided to seek a new position and became assistant managing editor of

the MIP. Goro worked directly under Lorant, who had been hired in 1928 "to instill a new vigor into the style and content" of the MIP.[7] Although Goro did not like Lorant personally, he readily admits Lorant had a special gift as an editor. "Professionally, I think he was one of the best picture editors of this time that ever was. I found him to be fair and a very talented journalist. I think he made out of the MIP a more lively magazine than the BIZ was and it was really a dangerous competitor to the BIZ. He could make layouts; he could take pictures; he could do absolutely anything." As Lorant's assistant, Goro learned a great deal about editing from contact sheets to make cohesive photoreportages.

In the early 1930s while Goro was working with Lorant in Munich, Germany was experiencing the economic repercussions of the U.S. stock market crash. As the depression in Germany deepened and unemployment grew, the National Socialist Party gained strength and popular support among the masses. The German press revealed its critical weaknesses during this crisis, and it "mirrored the mood and condition of the country—confusion, uncertainty, and fear, and the clash of irreconcilable parties and ideologies."[8] Like his fellow Germans, Goro watched Hitler and other prominent Nazis rise to power, but he did not then appreciate what was about to happen in his homeland.

"Many of us [Jews] were completely apolitical. It was our big mistake to be apolitical. But the German middle class, especially the German Jewish middle class, never knew what was going on in politics. And Hitler was a phenomenon which was not understood," Goro says. Between 1928 and 1931, the Nazis frequented a café in Munich's Englischer Garten where Goro and his colleagues from Knorr and Hirth regularly gathered. "We saw Hitler daily and we made jokes about him. We thought: 'What a clown,' instead of knowing what was ahead. This is a really incredible story. We didn't take him seriously. And many German Jews—who were very German by the way, great German patriots—they could never really understand Nazism. They didn't leave Germany because they said to themselves: 'We have never been anything in

politics. What can he do to me?' You know what happened. We were the victims of this clown because of our bourgeois shortsightedness."

He went on to say, with great regret, "It would have been very simple to kill all of them with a bomb or with a pistol. In five minutes I could have killed all the people who caused the death of millions of people. But of course it never occurred to us anything like this [to kill Hitler]. No violence ever."

When the Nazis took over Knorr and Hirth on March 14, 1933, Goro was fortunate to be out of the country, so he avoided arrest. Recovering from a bout with pneumonia, Goro with his wife had gone to a sanitorium in the Austrian mountains near the Swiss border. He called his office to see if he should return to work. "I was so stupidly naive politically that my first idea was: 'Who's going to make the next issue of the MÜNCHNER ILLUSTRIERTE PRESSE?'"

A perceptive secretary told Goro he still sounded ill and should stay in Austria until fully recovered. A Knorr and Hirth photographer then came to the sanitorium a few days later to explain that the entire top management had been arrested and jailed in Munich.

Goro knew he should not return to Germany, but his young son, Tom, was still in a boarding school in Munich and had to be rescued. His wife, Greta, wnet back to Germany on a slow-moving train and was met at the Munich station by friends who advised her to go to the school without stopping to see other friends or visiting their home. Greta and Tom returned to Austria without incident. Thus, the Goros began their new life as refugees with just 200 marks, some skiing equipment, the clothes they had taken to the sanitorium, and two Leicas.

They left Tyrol and went to Vienna, but could not find work there. In the meantime, Goro was officially fired from his MIP position on April 1, 1933. He could not secure a lawyer to try to obtain any of his possessions, so everything was lost, including family heirlooms and an extensive book collection. Their short time in Vienna became more bearable when Greta's relatives in the United States sent money.

Goro again credits the Leica when telling why he decided to become a professional photographer. Joining many other refugees in Paris, the Goros first considered starting a picture agency in April 1933, but lacked the necessary capital. They then decided to pursue photography full time, relying on Goro's experience at the BIZ and MIP and his brief experience as a freelancer. Goro says what attracted them to photography was the lightweight and versatile Leica, which made possible a new approach to reportage—an approach which had made his friend Salomon world famous. "I would not have become a photographer without the invention of the Leica. I probably would have become a designer or something like that," Goro explains.

Once in Paris, Goro contacted picture agents and American acquaintances. He received assignments and freelanced for a variety of French magazines, including VU, LA JOURNAL and VOGUE. But fees were paid late, if at all. "Materially, Paris was very bad except it was very nice to live in Paris even without money. It is the only city in the world where you can do this—enjoy life without money. We were professionally very successful except those bastards—French publishers and editors—never paid anything. It took a year, year and a half, to get any money out of them. Absolutely awful conditions."

The arrival of a gift of $100 from Greta's relatives in America prompted the Goros to consider moving to another part of France where that money would go farther than in Paris. In September they moved to Brittany, a reasonably priced area during the off-season. There they ate inexpensive seafood and photographed the French countryside and fishing villages they passsed as they rode along the coast on rented bicycles.

Following the new style of photographing "common life," Goro spent time on the Guerande peninsula in southern Brittany. His photographs showed ordinary Bretons earning their living from the sea: obtaining salt from sea water, harvesting black mollusks from the walls of concrete tanks, raising edible black mussels and catching

sardines. These photographs once again exemplify Goro's sensitivity to the graphic qualities of the photographic image, using strong diagonal lines to give the composition depth. His reportage included street scenes of a fisherman auctioning off his day's catch, the sacking of mussels for shipment to city markets, the drying and repairing of fishing nets, and shoppers clustered around street merchants on market day. These candid photographs, taken with a Leica, show a wide range of everyday activities and intriguing camera angles, including a dramatic view down at the Guerande street from a second-story location. In June 1937 the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC published twenty-three of these photographs plus captions over sixteen pages with Goro's credit line on each page.[9] (Goro inaccurately remembered that twenty-nine photographs were published.) Goro was paid $125 for his work, his first major sale after moving to the United States.

While living in Brittany, Goro photographed the largest ship in the world, the "Normandie." To emphasize the human element of this massive building project, his photoreportage featured a French crane operator who was working on the ship. With the help of his Paris picture agent, this turned into one of Goro's most successful freelance ventures. In 1934 this essay appeared in several European publications, including the ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, a weekly magazine.

After the Goros returned to Paris with the money from the sale of the "Normandie" essay, they tried to obtain visas to emigrate to the United States. Their American relatives told them it would be easier to help support them if they all lived in the same country. However, the Goros had "enormous difficulties" in obtaining visas from the American consulate in Paris. Goro blamed his trouble on an American consul he suspected was a Nazi. "Each time he asked for new kinds of papers and he procrastinated and when I got the papers he invented some other papers. We couldn't get a visa from him. The main reason was that we didn't have any cash reserves....We had nothing, so we were considered a very bad risk."

To circumvent the system, Goro consulted an acquaintance, Leland Stove, an American scientist and editor of the PARIS HERALD TRIBUNE whom he had met while on assignment for VU. Stove introduced Goro to the American general consul and the Goros got their visas directly through him. Although late in 1935 they gained permission to leave France for the United States, they did not have enough money to pay for the passage. To obtain additional funds from their relatives in America was out of the question because they knew they would have to rely on them once they arrived. Goro had been teaching photography in Paris to make extra money and one of his students, the director of the official French news agency, Havas, asked him when he was emigrating. When Goro implied they were having financial difficulty, his student said to see the head of the French shipping line who was "crazy about photographs of the ocean, of ships."

Goro obtained an audience with the shipping executive. Although the executive never directly commented on Goro's portfolio, which included photographs of the building of the "Normandie," Goro was sent to talk to the shipping line's passenger director. The director then arranged for the Goros to have a luxury suite on the "Isle de France" for the lowest fare possible.

GORO IN AMERICA

Goro's arrival in January 1936 in New York City was a very traumatic experience, as it was for most émigrés. At the age of thirty-five, he was adopting yet another home. He found himself rather overwhelmed by his new country and the financial struggle he and his family faced. Although he did not know English, he learned the language very quickly, as did his wife. They lived for a short time with Greta's relatives, then moved to a fifth-floor walkup on 96th Street. The Goro's paid $37.50 a month for an apartment and converted one of its two rooms into a darkroom where Greta printed the photographs she made of "spoiled brats" of some middle-class New York families. Later, to help pay their son's tuition at a progressive private school, Greta took portraits of the students there.

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Goro moved to resume his own career as a photographer by contacting his former boss at the BIZ, Kurt Korff, who was working then as a consultant to Time Inc.'s Experimental Department. With Korff's assistance, Goro says he made his first sale in the United States to TIME. It was also in his first months in the United States that he sold his first photo essay, the series "Where Bretons Wrest a Living from the Sea" published in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC.

Because of his association with Kurt Safranski at the BIZ, Goro also contacted Black Star Picture Agency. Soon afterwards Goro was under contract to the agency and quickly became acquainted with the American magazine market. His wife, who retained "Carola Gregor" as her professional name, also sold some photographs through Black Star. However, her photographic career was soon overshadowed by Goro's.

Looking back at his association with the agency, Goro expresses mixed feelings toward Black Star. Goro admits the agency was a great help in introducing him and his wife to the American magazine market. The agency also offered them the opportunity to associate with other talented photographers, including Andreas Feininger, Walter Sanders, Fritz Henle, and W. Eugene Smith. On the other hand, the agency's commission made it impossible to get ahead financially. (Goro remembers the commission to be fifty percent, but Black Star co-owner Ernest Mayer says the commission was between thirty and forty percent.)

"It was really an incredible collection of talented people and they lost us all. And they lost us...well, this is a very touchy subject what I have to talk about now. They lost us, I think, because of the fact how a picture agency has to be structured. Having a picture agency means having a great administrative apparatus; you have to keep pictures around, which means you need a lot of space. You need employees, offices—all of this is very expensive. It means having a picture agency costs a lot of money and probably you need a lot of capital. They were sort of forced, maybe against their will because they were very nice people, to exploit us. And I felt exploited! They sort of wanted to impress the editors of this new magazine [LIFE] by

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having very good but very inexpensive photographers."

However, Goro did benefit directly from the agency's policy of paying a monthly guarantee against photo sales when an automobile accident in 1936 kept him out of work for approximately a year. (Goro was in the middle of a freelance assignment for an advertising agency when the accident occured, so his wife finished it for him.) As he recuperated from his leg injury, Black Star paid him each month even though he could not go on assignment. However, he then owed a large debt to the agency Star when he returned to work.

"I was bitter because I couldn't pay my rent on time, I couldn't pay my phone bill on time. I had tremendous debts to Black Star and to the hospital. We had borrowed money. We never had any money. I had been busy as hell, but couldn't pay the rent. I had the feeling of severe bitterness and I didn't like them anymore—for material reasons. I felt exploited," Goro admits.

In 1937, still wearing a cast from his accident, Goro was sent by Black Star to photograph human brains waves for a LIFE layout.[10] That year he went on to produce numerous essays for LIFE on a wide range of topics, including the Harvard Library, how steam turbines are constructed, summer theatre in New England, and scientists who studied fruit flies and sea-urchin cells, and ice skating at Rockefeller Plaza.[11] These photographs illustrate Goro's versatilty, his attempt to incorporate unposed moments whenever possible, and his eye for unusual camera angles.

A coincidence, during two feature assignments for LIFE in the summer of 1937, turned out to be the pivotal point where Goro's career turned to science photography. While photographing the Cape Cod Summer Theatre[12] and providing photographs to illustrate an article on the book, "The Great Beach," Goro was called by a LIFE editor and asked to stay in the area to do two additional stories on a group of scientists at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts.[13]

Meeting some of the world's greatest scientists at Woods Hole stimulated his life-long interest in science. At the age of thirty-six, Goro's career was taking yet

another turn. Admittedly naive but curious about scientific subjects, Goro went on in his long career to make "a lot of pictures a professional photographer would never have done because he would have said it was absolutely out of the question, it could not be done. But I did it. I swim against the stream constantly."

LIFE soon offered him the opportunity to specialize, to become a photographic expert in science reporting. Up to this point, Goro had considered himself an all around magazine photographer, handling a range of human interest stories. But the experience at Woods Hole convinced him that scientific stories could be his speciality. He continued to cover a broad range of topics for Black Star, but the editors at LIFE sought him out when a scientific assignment arose. LIFE quickly became the primary outlet for Goro's photographs, although Black Star did place some of his work in the SATURDAY EVENING POST.

The agency's handling of a particular story in 1938 convinced him—in retrospect—he was being financially exploited and should work directly for LIFE. Black Star sent him to photograph a political organization in Canada which was sympathetic to the Nazis. As a Jew, he took a risk photographing this anti-Semitic group over a ten-day period, and he reported them to the U.S. State Department upon returning to New York. His essay was published anonymously in LIFE on July 18.[14] There is a candid quality to several of these images, especially those where the subject is gesturing while talking. LIFE editors used the photoreportage as the issue's opening three-page spread and ran several quite large photographs. Following the story's publication, members of the organization were arrested by the Canadian government.

This story was a "journalistic coup" in light of Americans' growing awareness of anti-Semitism in Europe, but Black Star treated it like any other story, according to Goro. "At this time there was so much money at LIFE. They would have paid $1,000 for the story. They didn't care how much they paid. LIFE never cared about money for twenty-five years." Instead, Goro remembers being paid $125 by the agency.

"Because of the strange arrangement with Black Star, with expenses being shared for flashbulbs which I used in large amounts and film developing in a custom lab, I had tremendous expenses for that story. I figured out one day that my net profit on this story...was $7.50."

Given Goro's general unhappiness with Black Star and his excellent publication record at LIFE, it is not surprising that when his agency contract ran out in 1940 LIFE editors were willing to put him directly under contract to the magazine. Goro might have moved up to staff photographer position in a few years, but he was not a U.S. citizen when the country entered World War II.

He and other émigré photographers like Andreas Feininger, Herbert Gehr, and Walter Sanders had their cameras confiscated for a few weeks after the invasion of Pearl Harbor, but resumed work soon afterwards. However, the émigrés were not permitted to handle potentially sensitive assignments involving anything vaguely connected to "national security" or the war effort. Nevertheless, their names remained on the masthead and they continued to receive other assignments. In the August 7, 1944, issue of LIFE, Goro's name was officially added to the masthead under the list of staff photographers.

During his twenty-seven years at LIFE, Goro became well known for his excellent scientific and medical stories. Two of the magazine's editors claimed responsibility for "discovering" Goro's special talent. Managing editor Wilson Hicks and science editor Andrew Heiskel both recognized Goro's ability to handle complex scientific developments. Goro credits them both and admits that working on science reportages probably was the best outlet for his creative abilities. Realizing science was considered by the public to be dull, boring and visually uninteresting when he first began specializing at LIFE, Goro looked for the human element in each story as well as the interesting visual aspects of the scientific research he covered. Goro regularly included a portrait of the man or woman behind the research he was photo-

graphing and his subjects' hands were frequently shown turning dials or holding instruments.

Goro clearly believes he had the talent to capture the essence of complicated stories on film, and Dora Jane Hamblin, former LIFE researcher, agreed. Describing Goro as one of the magazine's "memorable" photographers, Hamblin said he was

> a small and patient German-born perfectionist who could translate the most obscure thought or discovery into meticulous, understandable photographs....Goro turned out a stream of impossibilities. One of his most complex was an explanation of how the laser beam works.[15]

Former managing editor Edward K. Thompson agrees with this appraisal, stating that Goro was "the best there was. He understood what he was doing before he would even tackle an assignment."[16]

Goro's technical precision was a characteristic shared by many of the émigré photographers trained in Europe, according to Thompson.[17] Before going on assignment Goro did his "homework," becoming familiar with the scientist's work so he could speak his language. Within a short time, Goro felt he was an equal among the scientists whose work he photographed for LIFE. He believes he gained their respect by working in the same manner they did: carefully, thoroughly, and meticulously. For Goro, it was his moral and ethical duty to satisfy the scientists he worked with; he would rather disappoint his editor than disappoint a scientist.

Like the scientists, Goro considers himself a pioneer. He also identifies more closely with the scientists than with artists. "There is great satisfaction to be with scientists, and satisfaction for me to be an instrument of communication. I don't want to be an artist. It is understood that I mastered a large number of photographic techniques. I have a great satisfaction with having become in a small way an instrument of communication between the strange, difficult to understand world of research and the public."

Goro worked hard to earn the respect of the scientists he dealt with. "They have to accept my work and me," Goro says of the scientists. Without their cooperation, he could not have completed his many LIFE essays because of his need for access to their laboratories, their instruments, and their time and expertise. Unlike some other assignments where a professional can roam and photograph at will, Goro is completely dependent upon his subjects' belief in his ability as a photographer.

The scientific community was very accommodating to Goro even before he joined the LIFE staff. In one instance a doctor at the University of Chicago worked forty-eight hours with him to produce the first still photograph of capillary circulation. Goro was given the use of the Pupin Physics Laboratory at Columbia University for eighteen months to produce several photoreportages, including an eighteen-page essay in 1949, "The Atom, A Layman's Primer of What the World Is Made Of." When Goro photographed the bomb tests on Bikini, he was there as a member of the military-scientific task force, on loan from LIFE to the government at full salary, rather than as a regular member of the press corps.

Goro's acceptance in the scientific community brought numerous honors and opportunities, including appointment as visual consultant to a neuro-physiological teaching project at the School of Medicine at the University of California in San Diego. He was appointed to a Regents Professorship at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California in La Jolla and to an adjunct professorship at the Marine Sciences Research Center at State University of New York in Stony Brook. Goro was a visiting fellow at Yale and a fellow of the Biological Photographic Association and the New York Microscopical Society. The American Association of Magazine Photographers awarded Goro the Lifetime Achievement Award in 1978.

This dual respect from the scientific community and from his colleagues in photojournalism represents the new status attainable by professional photographers in the United States. When Goro arrived in this country early in 1936, working

photographers were not highly regarded: "It was much more reputable to be a photographer in Germany than a photojournalist in America at the time I arrived," he explains. The American picture magazines of the late 1930s and 1940s helped elevate the status of professional photographers; in complementary fashion, the professionalism which photographers like Goro, Andreas Feininger, Philippe Halsman, Nina Leen, W. Eugene Smith, and Alfred Eisenstaedt brought to LIFE, helped make it the greatest picture magazine in the United States.

Goro's concern for professionalism was evident in the fall of 1944 when he met with some colleagues to discuss the formation of a new organization—the American Society of Magazine Photographers. Along with fellow émigrés Halsman, Feininger, and Fritz Henle, as well as Smith, Arthur Rothstein, William Vandivert, and John Adam Knight, Goro became one of the first members of the ASMP. During its history the ASMP has established guidelines and a minimum on rates and rights for professional photographers.

GORO'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO LIFE

Although he was very important in developing the techniques of scientific photography and in raising the status of professional photographers, Goro's most important role was that of a LIFE photographer. It was while working with LIFE that Goro and his fellow émigrés introduced a new approach to American magazine photography. Edward K. Thompson acknowledged in an interview that LIFE owed a great deal of its success to Goro and his fellow émigré photographers.[18] In talking with Thompson and the others who participated in this research, it became clear that Goro and his fellow European-trained photographers had several important qualities to offer the magazine's editors:

—the émigrés were outsiders examining America for the first time, their cameras offering a fresh look at institutions, people, and places;

—the émigrés came from varied backgrounds and most were well educated and involved in other professions before becoming photographers, so their interests were

wide ranging; and

—the émigrés were exposed to the European picture magazines, both from the producer and consumer standpoint, which gave them experience with the candid style and photoreportages.

Like Goro, Maitland Edey, former assistant managing editor of LIFE and author of GREAT PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAYS FROM LIFE,[19] gives the émigrés credit for bringing the Leica and candid style of photography to the United States:

> I should caution, however, that the candid style itself—more than any individual expression of it—was what, in my opinion, was the greatest contribution of German photographers in the 1930s. They were following the track of Salomon; and the new cameras, with their potential for candid coverage of news, was what attracted LIFE, and made its breezy, close-in multi-exposure coverage of the news possible. The 35mm format also made film cheap, which encouraged much more lavish use of it by photographers, which, in turn, produced large takes, which in turn suggested the buildup of takes into multi-picture stories. That was a LIFE innovation here—it had already started in Europe, of course.
>
> In short, LIFE saw what was being done and what was possible, and commissioned people to go out and do the same. The interests and the styles of the individual photographers grew out of that opportunity: Goro and Vishniac as scientific workers, for example. 20

Goro and his fellow émigré photographers offered LIFE a great deal of versatility, while, at the same time, many of them became specialists. Feininger, for one, concentrated on landscapes and cityscapes, rarely turning his camera on individuals. Another émigré—Dmitri Kessel—retained his larger-than-life style of photography from his early years as an industrial photographer even when he broadened the scope of his subject matter.[21]

In return for their efforts, the magazine gave them a package of benefits few could pass up. The company offered them more than good salaries. Goro found LIFE to be a "fantastic organization" that provided him the opportunity to take as much time on an assignment as he needed. The editors had enough confidence in their photographers and reporters to trust them to get the story, even if months were needed to do the job, as was the case near the end of World War II when Goro produced

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the first photographs of plutonium.

"It was an incredible relationship between the photographers and the management. We were all sort of a fraternity....We all now are conscious of the fact that in the history of journalism, this had never happened before—this trust in the journalist, the photographer, the writer, the researcher, and also the readiness of spending the most incredible sums of money. This money is not there anymore. You have no idea how expensive and risky it is to do this," Goro says of LIFE's method of operation.

The reputation LIFE had developed helped it become "the" place for a magazine photographer to be published in the 1940s and 1950s, especially with the added power of Time Inc. behind the magazine. In addition to a "club" atmosphere and a seemingly unlimited expense account, Goro and his colleagues had access to a complete support staff, which freed them from routine tasks.[22] Because the magazine was published every week, photographers did not have to wait long to see their work, and LIFE editors gave photographs good play. The company even had a profit-sharing program in which Goro and his colleagues participated. LIFE treated its employees, especially the photographers, very well. In turn, the photographers became fiercely loyal to the organization. "God the Photographer"—the title of a chapter in Hamblin's book—suggests just how much status they attained at LIFE.

Considering the advantages LIFE offered, it is not surprising the magazine's management was able to "lure" Goro and others away from Black Star. Mayer and his partners could not compete with LIFE forever, although Goro did have a relatively long association with the agency. However, once a photographer had established a reputation as a competent and talented professional, LIFE editors encouraged him to work directly for the magazine. Leon Daniels and Franz Furst at Pix Picture Agency in New York City also lost established photographers who wanted to avoid paying agency commissions. Nevertheless, agencies such as Black Star and Pix provided a valuable service to LIFE: they introduced editors to a steady stream of talented photographers who were familiar with 35mm photography and the style of photoreportage

pioneered in the BIZ and MIP.

During his twenty-seven years with the magazine, Goro covered a wide range of assignments. He produced essays on the anthropology of primitive people, archaeology, palaeontology, geology, geophysics, oceanography and marine biology, genetics and genetic manipulation, plant physiology and animal behavior, medicine, psychiatry, and mental health. Goro went on several expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic, the interior of Australia, and the islands of the Western Pacific. The first extensive journalistic coverage of the Canadian tundra, involving seven weeks of only radio contact with the outside world, was undertaken in 1953 by Goro and reporter James Goode.

Much of what Goro did at LIFE involved "firsts" in still photography. He was the first to show the fission of a uranium atom, blood circulating in living animals, pitchblende mining (the source of uranium), and laser beams. One author summarized his determination and ingenuity:

> Goro has a reputation for doing the impossible with his photography, and lack of existing technology has never been a deterrent. If there is not a camera made to photograph a particular minute or inaccessible subject, Goro will construct one. His achievements have been a boon to both scientists and laymen.23

CONCLUSIONS

Fritz Goro's professional biography provides a model of the German-trained European who overcame the hardships of emigration to establish a successful career in the United States. When Goro arrived in this country, he brought with him experience as a freelance photographer, magazine art director/designer and contact/idea man, and assistant managing editor of the MIP. This valuable training on two of Germany's most prestigious and successful picture magazines enabled him to make important contributions to America's first picture magazine.

Like many of his fellow émigré photographers, Goro's association with Black Star stemmed from his acquaintance with Kurt Safranski. The time he spent as an agency

photographer allowed him to become acclimated to his new environment, to learn to speak English and to become known to the editors at LIFE. Black Star proved to be a valuable link between Goro and LIFE, securing numerous assignments for him during the magazine's first four years of operation.

The assignments he covered in Europe and during the first few years in this country were quite diverse, many of a general-interest "feature" nature. He incorporated candid photographs in his shooting as much as possible and looked for visual-

Stimulated by an interest in scientific topics, Goro began specializing in the late 1930s in stories concerning science and medicine. By then he and his fellow emigres had successfully introduced German picture magazine practices to American editors. The editors at LIFE were alert to find a photographer's speciality and then capitalize on it by allowing the photographer to handle assignments in specific areas. Because Goro showed talent for translating difficult, complex scientific stories in ways laymen could understand, he was allowed to devote weeks, even months, to his assignments. These assignments required a style very different from that which he practiced in his early photographic career. The scientific and medical assignments were completed under highly controlled circumstances where technical problems were his greatest challenge. Although he occasionally worked on an assignment where candid photographs were taken, most of Goro's essays consisted of images made under the strictest of scientific controls.

Nevertheless, Goro's European training taught him to be disciplined, thoughtful, and thorough—characteristics he shared with many of his fellow émigré photographers. Like the others, he had a talent for detail, could cover a broad range of assignments, and knew how to translate even the most complicated issues into photographs a mass audience could appreciate. Goro's strong educational base and variety of experiences in numerous countries also enabled him to deal with all types of subjects, including scientists, actresses, and aborigines.

Goro's ability brought him great personal success and recognition as an outstanding photojouranlist. Yet, many of the turning points in his life happened because he was a member of a special group at a special time in history: German Jew, highly educated, a broad cultural background, limited financial resources, and experience with the German illustrated magazines. These men and women had a tremendous influence on LIFE by using the 35mm camera, the candid approach, and the photo essay at a time when this new approach to photojournalism had not yet been widely accepted by American publishers.

NOTES

1

All quotes from Fritz Goro are taken from two face-to-face interviews I conducted with him. The first interview took place in the Time-Life Building in New York City on 9 May 1979. The second interview took place at his home in Chappaqua, NY, on 12 March 1980.

2

Tim Gidal, MODERN PHOTOJOURNALISM: ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION, 1910-1933 (New York: Collier Books, 1972): p. 27.

3

Ibid.

4

Gisele Freund, PHOTOGRAPHY & SOCIETY (Boston: David R. Godine, 1980): p. 113.

5

Ibid., p. 118, p. 124.

6

For example, see the following in the MIP: "Ein Stiller Tag," 9 (3 July 1932): 714-15; "Monche Erobern Neuland," 9 (25 September 1932): 1051-53; "Zug ins Unbekannte Land," 9 (25 September 1932): 1077; and "Diamantene Hochzeit," 9 (16 October 1932): 1073.

7

Gidal, op. cit., p. 17.

8

Oron J. Hale, THE CAPTIVE PRESS IN THE THIRD REICH (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964): p. 13.

9

Fritz Goro, "Where Bretons Wrest a Living from the Sea," NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC 71 (June 1937): 751-66.

10

See: "Brain Waves of Mental Cases Like Those of Sleepers," LIFE 3 (18 October 1937): 56-58.

11

See the following essays in LIFE: "Best University Library: Harvard's," 3 (7 June 1937): 74; "Highly-Efficient Steam Turbines Make 70% of U.S. Power," 3 (25 October 1937): 64-66; "Theatre Goes 'Straw Hat' in Summer," 3 (23 August 1937): 28-35; "Dr. Morgan's Fruit Flies Explain Heredity," 3 (13 September 1937): 69; and "New Life is Created without Sex," 3 (13 September 1937): 70-72.

12

See: "Theatre Goes 'Straw Hat' in Summer," LIFE, op. cit.

13

See: "Life Goes to a Party with Picnicking Scientists on Penikese Island," LIFE, 3 (27 September 1937): 114-6.

14

See his fourteen-picture essay entitled "Canadian Fascists Give Dominion a Headache and Opponents the Bum's Rush," LIFE 5 (18 July 1938): 9-11.

15

Dora Jane Hamblin, THAT WAS THE LIFE (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1977): pp. 55, 59.

16

Edward K. Thompson, interview at his office in the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC, 23 November 1979.

17
Ibid.
18
Ibid.
19
Maitland Edey, GREAT PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAYS FROM LIFE (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1978).
20
Maitland Edey, personal correspondence from his home in Vineyard Haven, MA, 8 November 1979.
21
Wilson Hicks, WORDS AND PICTURES: AN INTRODUCTION TO PHOTOJOURNALISM (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952): p. 90.
22
Hamblin, op. cit.
23
Dorian Rogers, "Fritz Goro," PRINT 33 (July/August 1979): 58. Also see: Leonard Lessin, "Science Journalist with a Camera," PHOTOMETHODS 25 (May 1982): 82-88.